

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

**Please amend the claims as follows:**

1 (currently amended). An optical connector, comprising:

a probe comprising a rigid support encasing an optical fiber

a receptacle formed from a material softer than said rigid support, said  
receptacle comprising an opening to receive said probe; and

a sleeve lining an inner wall of said opening directly against the  
material softer than said rigid support, and wherein an end of the sleeve is  
flush with the opening.

2 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 1 wherein said sleeve is  
substantially cylindrical in shape and has a C-shaped cross section.

3 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 2 wherein said sleeve  
comprises one of a ceramic and a metal.

4 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 2 wherein said sleeve  
comprises brass.

5 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 3 wherein said connector

comprises one of an SC connector and an LC connector.

6 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 5 wherein said sleeve is a press-fit sleeve.

7 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 3 wherein said receptacle comprises injection molded plastic.

8 (original). The optical connector as recited in claim 7 wherein said injection molded plastic comprises polyetherimide (PEI).

9 (currently amended). A method for fortifying an optical connector, comprising:

encasing a fiber optic within a rigid probe;

forming a receptacle with a plastic having an opening to receive said rigid probe; and

fitting a sleeve flush within said opening directly against the plastic to protect said plastic from said rigid probe.

10 (original). The method as recited in claim 10 further comprising:

forming said sleeve having a substantially cylindrical shape and having a C-shaped cross section with a gap along one side.

11 (original). The method as recited in claim 10 wherein said fitting comprises:

compressing said sleeve to close said gap; and  
pressing said sleeve into said opening.

12 (original). The method as recited in claim 11 wherein said sleeve comprises one of a metal and a ceramic.

13 (original). The method as recited in claim 11 wherein said sleeve comprises brass.

14 (original). The method as recited in claim 11 further comprising:  
forming said receptacle from injection molded plastic.

15 (original). The method as recited in claim 14 wherein said plastic comprises polyetherimide (PEI).

16 (currently amended). A small form factor (SFF) pluggable connector for an optical system, comprising:

a male plug comprising a fiber optic encased in a rigid probe;

one of an SC and LC female receptacle formed from injection molded

plastic, said receptacle comprising an opening to receive said probe; and

a press fitted sleeve lining an inner wall of said opening directly  
against the injection molded plastic to protect said injection molded plastic  
from direct contact with probe, wherein an end of the sleeve is flush with the  
opening.

17 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16, wherein said  
injection molded plastic comprises polyetherimide (PEI).

18 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16 wherein said  
press fitted sleeve comprises a generally cylindrical in shape having a C-  
shaped cross section.

19 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16 wherein said  
press fitted sleeve comprises one of a metal and a ceramic.

20 (original). A SSF pluggable connector as recited in claim 16 wherein said  
press fitted sleeve comprises brass.